

HEALTHY INCENTIVES PILOT (HIP) INTERIM REPORT — SUMMARY

Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support

July 2013

Background

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 authorized funds for pilot projects to determine if financial incentives provided to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients at the point-of-sale increase the consumption of fruits, vegetables, or other healthful foods. On the basis of this legislative authority, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) designed the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) to promote the purchase and consumption of fruits and vegetables without added sugars, fats, oils, or salt (the same set of fruits and vegetables eligible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Voucher).

Under HIP, SNAP participants received an incentive of 30 cents for every SNAP dollar spent on targeted fruits and vegetables credited back to their SNAP Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. The incentive could then be spent on any SNAP-eligible foods and beverages.

Implemented by the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) in Hampden County, HIP operated between November 2011 and December 2012. The county includes urban, rural, and suburban populations with a total of approximately 55,000 SNAP households. Hampden County has the lowest median household income in the State.

Methods

HIP is being evaluated using a rigorous research design. Of the SNAP households in Hampden County, 7,500 were randomly assigned to the HIP group and the remaining households to the non-HIP group. The overall goal of the

evaluation is to assess the impact of HIP on participants' intake of fruits and vegetables. The Interim report provides early estimates of fruit and vegetable consumption among participants and other early pilot impacts four to six months after implementation.

This report is based on participant surveys conducted just before and 4 to 6 months after implementation. The surveys include 24-hour dietary recalls in addition to information about attitudes and preferences for fruits and vegetables and shopping patterns. Analyses of participant spending and incentive earnings are presented based on EBT transactions data for the first 6 months of the pilot.

Findings

Targeted Fruits and Vegetables:

- **Primary impact:** Interim results indicate that HIP participants (respondents aged 16 and older) consumed one-fifth of a cup-equivalents more targeted fruits and vegetables per day than did non-participants. This represents a difference of 25 percent in consumption over control group members. The one-fifth cup brings consumption levels approximately 17 percent closer to the *Healthy People 2020* objectives for total fruit and vegetable intake.
- **Fruits vs. Vegetables:** Approximately 60 percent of the observed difference was due to a difference in consumption of vegetables and 40 percent due to a difference in consumption of fruit.

Expenditures on Fruits and Vegetables:

- **Incentive earnings:** During the first half year of pilot operations, two-thirds of HIP households earned some incentive; the other one-third of households did not earn any incentives in a given month.
- **Household expenditures:** On average, during March to July 2012, HIP households spent \$12.13 on targeted fruits and vegetables in participating stores and earned an average incentive of \$3.64 each month. Excluding those households that did not earn any incentive during the month, HIP households made \$18.50 in targeted fruit and vegetable purchases and earned \$5.55 in incentives.
- **Self-reported purchasing:** HIP survey respondents reported changes in fruit and vegetable purchasing, saying that they bought larger amounts and a greater variety of fruits and vegetables because of HIP. Self-reported spending on fruits and vegetables was significantly higher for HIP households than non-HIP households.
- **Perceived impacts on cost:** The majority (70 percent) of HIP households felt that fruits and vegetables had become more affordable due to HIP.

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Barriers:

- **Participant Understanding:** Forty percent of HIP participants reported that they had not heard about the pilot when asked 4 to 6 months after implementation. Forty percent also reported that it was hard (or they didn't know whether it was easy or hard) to understand how HIP works; a similar percentage said it was hard (or they didn't know whether it was easy or hard) to remember which fruits and vegetables qualified for the incentive.

- **Participant Satisfaction:** Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated that they would like to keep participating in HIP.
- **Exposure to nutrition information:** HIP increased the probability of having heard or seen messages about fruits and vegetables, while not increasing the probability of participating in a nutrition education class.
- **Availability of fruits and vegetables in the home:** HIP participants more frequently had fruit and vegetables available at home than did households not participating in HIP.

The final report will expand on this interim report by including data from a third participant survey which took place nine to eleven months after HIP implementation. The resulting larger sample will yield more precise and confirmatory estimates of the impacts of HIP. The final report will also provide more detailed analyses of incentive earnings and shopping patterns, as well as the costs associated with the pilot.

For More Information

Bartlett, Susan, Jacob Klerman, Parke Wilde, Lauren Olsho, Michelle Blocklin, Christopher Logan, and Ayesha Enver. *Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) Interim Report*. Prepared by Abt Associates for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, July 2013. Available online at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.